

The World of Learning

Pressures on Education

By J. BASCOM ST. JOHN

Education's function in the modern world — a changing world with transformed values and revolutionizing techniques—is a matter for concern to all thoughtful people. It is fruitless to hope that though all else is changing, education might remain the same. It is impossible to determine whether education should attempt to lead in new directions, or follow trends set in motion by other forces. That education will, however, change in method, emphasis and content seems inevitable. How this will occur is still a vast uncertainty.

Some cogent thought on these and other problems were put before students of the University of Western Ontario last week by Sir Philip Morris, vice-chancellor of the University of Bristol, when he inaugurated the Undergraduate Lecture Series, a new program sponsored by Middlesex College, which will bring distinguished scholars from many fields to the university from time to time. Sir Philip's brilliant career in both education and public service lent fitting distinction to the occasion.

One of the baffling aspects of the times is the very uncertainty with which education is meeting its difficulties. In Sir Philip's view, education is actually evading the decisions which it must make. The educational program is still viewing the world in the simpler pattern of farm, home

and school, which in a country like Canada once formed the foundation of our society. The isolation of these institutions has now broken down completely, but there has not been a corresponding change in the outlook of education.

Our world has been immeasurably influenced by the new pressures of advertising, television, mass entertainment and radio, and in some cases these seem to have a greater social influence than the schools and universities. Education has been able to do very little to set the tone of their influence. In most instances, it does not seem even to try. In fact, heavy pressures have been brought to bear on education to make it abandon its standards.

Contrasting our present society with that well within the lifetime of middle-aged people, it was easy, thought Sir Philip, to show the changes that had taken place. As a child in a small community, he was wholly unable to escape the influence of the home and the church. The school was without rival as a source of instruction, and neighborhood standards governed life with an iron hand. All eyes were on the children, as well as the grown-ups, and life had its specific patterns which were almost impossible to break.

Nowadays, he declared, many children grow up without experiencing any of these influences. The character of the home has changed. The once-dominant influence of the church and its standards are no longer important in

the lives of most people. The impersonality of modern city life has wholly withdrawn the pressure of social and neighborhood standards, which used to share with the law a great deal of the control of society. The school shares with many other institutions the molding of mind and character. And of these institutions the schools and universities probably have the greatest responsibility to regain the influence they once possessed.

Our modern society relies on education to insure its working. We have come more and more to depend on experts and specialists. The demand for these people has become so strong that heavy pressure is placed on education to supply them in sufficient quantity. The nature of specialization in work implies specialization in training, and Sir Philip saw great danger to the quality of education if the tendency to specialization were allowed to proceed freely. He believes that we need to show the relationship between aspects of knowledge, especially in the universities, where the tendency to break subjects down into segments was particularly strong.

A subject, he said, is dangerous if it is autonomous. We have to keep in mind questions of relevance, suitability and value. We must avoid oversimplifying our problems and strive to keep in view the difference between diversity and fragmentation.

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